

Stranger Things 3 and a Half by **elizabethfisher**

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Summary: My take on what happened after the battle of Starcourt and beyond. Not sure how far it will go!

1. Chapter One: Gone

Disclaimer: I own nothing ST! This is just my idea of what would happen next. Also I've changed the spelling from Mrs.Byers to Ms. because Mrs. implies that she's still married to Lonnie and I'm not about that. Jopper forever! haha! SPOILERS ARE AHEAD. STOP NOW IF YOU HAVE NOT FINISHED SEASON 3!Final warning!

Chapter One: Gone

Eleven felt heavy all of the sudden. She fell to her knees, tears running down her face. Gone. He couldn't be gone. She couldn't hear anything around her, just the sound of her own sobs, ringing in her ears.

"Mike!" Max yelled from the gurney she sat on. She had been giving one of Doc Owens' guys a statement about Billy, tears fresh on her own face.

Mike looked at Max from the back of the ambulance he was sitting in. She pointed and he turned his head, following her finger. He had been answering questions from the paramedic and hadn't noticed Eleven on her knees in the middle of the mall parking lot, tears running down her face.

"Shit!" He exclaimed, jumping up, shoving past the medic, and running to Eleven. She collapsed into him, her head buried in his chest.

"El? El, What happened?"

"Gone. Gone," she repeated, over and over. "He's gone."

"Who?" He racked his brain, knowing gone was her way of saying dead. Billy? The mind flayer? He looked around him, panicked. He saw Ms.Byers hugging Will. Relief flooded him, they had made it out. He searched for Hopper, but only saw Murry standing near a firetruck. He turned his attention back to Eleven. "El, who's gone?"

"Hop..."

It came out like a whisper. She was choking on her own tears. He shifted and sat on the ground, pulling her into his lap, her head still buried in his chest, and held her. Tears began to come down his own cheeks, the relief he'd felt just moments ago was no longer in him. He tightened his arms around her and pressed his face into her hair.

The police chief may have been a pain in his side most of the time, but he had loved El, and for that Mike had always been grateful.

He wasn't sure how long they sat there like that but, eventually, Will and Ms.Byers came over to them. Before they knew it they were being pulled to their feet and in the middle of a group hug.

When they broke apart Ms.Byers held onto Eleven. She put both hands on El's cheeks, tears running down both their faces.

"Oh, sweet girl. I'm so sorry," Joyce whispered. "We tried so hard, but he knew that we had to stop it to save you guys. He didn't see another way."

Joyce pulled her into another hug.

"Joyce?" The voice of Dr.Owens was clear in the chaotic crowd. He motioned for Ms.Byers to come over to him.

Ms.Byers let go of Eleven, gave her one last sad look, then walked over to the doctor.

Mike put his arm around El, guiding her back to sit on the back of the ambulance. He watched Ms.Byers tell the doctor what had happened.

Eventually, the adults came over to them. All the kids had gathered around Mike and Eleven.

"You are all cleared to go home," Dr.Owens stated. "We will deal with the mess here, we'll contact any family members we need to," he looked at Max. "Tomorrow, we will fill all you in more on cover stories. For now, go home. Get some rest."

With that he walked away.

"I don't know if I can go home," Max said. Her arms were wrapped around her body, as if holding herself together. Lucas moved closer to her and put his arm around her.

"You all are more than welcome to come home with us," said Ms.Byers. "Being together right now, well, it's what we all need."

Steve and Robin opted to go home, they promised Lucas they would make sure Erica got home safely as well, and would have the officer taking them home bring Dustin to the Byers'.

Mike helped El into a police car that would take them to the Byers'. They all seemed to be moving like zombies, slow and just going through the motions, no feeling behind them. Mike leaned against the window of the police car, El leaned into him, Will on the other side of her. The car was silence except for the sound of the road bumping under them as they headed home.

Hope you enjoyed chapter 1!

xoxo- El.

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2. Chapter Two: Girl Talk

Mike helped Eleven to the couch, her leg still hurting her pretty bad. She propped it up on the coffee table.

"We should clean that again," Max stated, gesturing to El's leg.

Eleven nodded. She was dirty and tired, her body was physically ready to give out and she was emotionally drained.

"Mike, help me get her to the bathroom."

Mike and Max helped El hobble to the bathroom, getting her to sit on the closed toilet lid, then Max took over, shooing Mike out.

"Grab me a clean bath towel and ask Ms.Byers if she has any clean clothes. Two sets." Max ordered before shutting the door in his face.

"Max," Eleven started, her voice was hoarse from screaming in fear most of the night. "I'm okay. Really. I can clean up myself."

"With that leg? Yeah right."

She went over to the tub and turned on the water, sticking her hand in the stream to make sure it was warm before plugging the drain. She could feel El's eyes on her. She sighed and sat down on the edge of the tub.

"I'm fine. I just... I can't focus on Billy being gone right now. I can't change it, but I can help you feel better so that's what I'm going to do. Okay?"

El nodded. "Okay."

Max shut the water off. "Do you need help?" She asked as El tried to stand to undress. El shook her head.

Knowing how shy Eleven was Max faced the door while El climbed into the tub of warm water. She pulled the shower curtain closed behind her and heard Max sit on the closed toilet lid.

El was more bruised than she realized. The warm water relaxed her muscles but it also allowed her to find everywhere her body hurt. After a few moments of silence Max spoke, concern in her voice.

"El? You drown in there?"

"No." El moved to grab the shampoo to start attempting to clean her hair. It hurt to raise her arms above her head. "I need a cup. For water."

"Okay. I'll be right back."

Eleven heard the door open and close. She sat in the water, watching bubble fall into it from her hair, and thought about the night they had all had. She was still amazed that Billy had sacrificed himself for her. Her sadness for him and for Hop was heavy.

The bathroom door opened again and she saw Max's hand appear behind the curtain, holding a large orange Tupperware cup.

"Thank you," Eleven said quietly. Her voice was raw with emotion. She felt close to tears again. She took the cup and began gathering water to rinse her hair.

"It's gonna be okay, you know. Ms.Byers, she wouldn't let anyone just take you." Max's voice came through the shower curtain. "And you have all of us. Hell, I'll talk my parents into letting you stay with me if I have to."

El smiled to herself, she was thankful to have her friends. She slowly rinsed her hair, repeated with a second wash. She moved very slowly. As she finished washing up she heard a knock on the door.

"Hey, um, I have... stuff." Came Mike's voice, muffled slightly by the door.

Max huffed. El knew she was making the face she always made when annoyed and probably rolling her eyes. She heard Max get up from the toilet and opened the door just enough to take the towels and clothes from Mike, before shutting it in his face again.

"You ready to get out?"

"Yes."

Max stuck her hand through the curtain again, this time holding a towel. El stood slowly, using the walls for balance, wrapped the towel around her, pulled back the curtain, and got out of the tub.

"Damn," Max said, seeing the bruises all over El. "Um, clothes." She said, handing Eleven a shirt and pair of sweat shorts. "Probably Will's, but they'll work."

Eleven looked at the stripped shirt. She knew this shirt. "No. Not Will's," her fingers touched the fabric gently. "Mike's."

"Guess they went home and got stuff." Max held up a second shirt, a sleeveless gray shirt. "Yep. That's Lucas." She sighed. "Boys."

El started to get dressed as Max drained the tub and prepared to get in the shower.

"So... what are you gonna do about Mike?"

"Do about him?"

"Yeah, I mean, are you going to forgive him for lying? Do you want him to be your boyfriend again?"

El looked at herself in the mirror in Mike's shirt. She breathed in the smell of Tide detergent that always reminded her of him.

"I... don't know." Her mind went to Hopper, he was close to her and now he was gone. Her chest got tight, she felt like she couldn't breathe. What if something happened to Mike next? Would it be safer for him if he stayed away from her? The thought of being away from him made her chest tighten even more.

"You know," Max said, stepping into the shower. "Maybe... maybe I was to harsh about Mike."

El sat on the closed toilet and listened to the shower water hit the tub as Max got cleaned.

"Ew," Max said to herself. "All I'm saying," she spoke to El though the

curtain this time. "Is that he seems to really care about you. Even though his lie was a stupid one, it allowed us to become better friends, so in a way, it was helpful. Does that make sense?"

El thought about it. She hadn't really wanted to dump his ass, but she had been hurt by the lie he had told. She had always been able to count on him, to know that he would always tell her the truth, and that was gone now.

But he did apologize. She thought. And he did try to explain how he felt about her.

"Hey, Max?"

"Yeah?" She heard Max shut off the water so she got up and handed her a towel.

As Max stepped out of the shower El asked, "What makes you crazy?"

"Um, like in general?" Max asked, a confused look on her face.

"Mike, he was talking to me in the store, when we fixed my leg." El explained. "He said, that something makes you crazy. Like, a feeling and old people say it sometimes?" El was trying to remember what all Mike had said. "Blank makes you crazy."

Max laughed so hard she snorted. "Oh my God. Leave it to Mike Wheeler to not be able to say the L word."

"The L word?"

"Love. The saying is 'love makes you crazy'. And it has definitely made him crazy." Max started to get dressed.

Eleven thought about it. Love. She had looked up the definition of the word once. She had heard what Mike said, in the cabin when he was mad at Max. That he loved her and didn't want to lose her again, and he'd been very close to losing her tonight. Did he mean it? Could he really love her?

The closest she'd come to love was Hopper, but it was different. The love she had for Hop came from a feeling of safety, not a romantic

love. Nothing like the nervous butterflies Mike gave her. Was that love, too?

"Ready?" Max asked, her hand on the door knob. Her red hair was still wet and dripping on her shirt.

"Yes."

Max opened the door then put her arm around Eleven, helping her out the door.

I loved the growth of Elmax in S3! Having that girl best friend is so important, especially for someone like Eleven. I didn't always agree with the relationship advice of Max and Lucas, but it was true 14 year old advice! I think Max realized that she was wrong about Mike's wanting to control El in the cabin. We have to remember she wasn't there in S1 to see Eleven fresh out of the lab so she doesn't understand how impressionable El is, or how much Mike means to Eleven.

xoxo- El.

3. Chapter Three: Healing

Max lead El back to the living room where they found all the boys, including Dustin, changed, having cleaned up as much as they could with just some soap and the kitchen sink. They were eating pizza around the coffee table.

El sat on the couch, propping her leg back up as Max got the Byers' first aid kit and wrapped her leg again.

As Max finished, Mike got up and walked to the kitchen. He came back holding two empty plates and two cans of coke. He handed one of each to Max and Eleven.

"Thanks," El said quietly as Mike sat next to her, sliding a slice of pizza onto her plate. Max sat next to Lucas on the floor across from them.

"Welcome. Feel better?"

She tried to shrug her shoulders through the pain she felt. "Thanks," she said quietly. "For the clothes."

"Oh, yeah. Yeah. No problem." He gave her a small smile which she tried to return, but she felt like it wasn't genuine. She felt a sadness clinging to her. "We figured we'd all need stuff so we had Jonathan drive us home to gather supplies. Tomorrow we can go out to the cabin or something and grab you your own stuff. If you want."

She nodded but she honestly didn't know what she wanted. She was unsure about everything now.

She ate her slice of pizza in silence, listening to her friends talk.

"So we get away from the mall," Lucas was talking animatedly with his hands. "Mind Flayer takes off after us, and all the sudden we hear Dusty-bun over there," Lucas gestured to Dustin. "Singing through the walkie. Siiinnnggging." He stressed the word.

"No shit!" Max looked from Lucas to Dustin, amusement on her face. "What song?"

Lucas cleared his throat and began, "Turn around, look at what you seeeeeeee." He stopped singing, "Come on Dusty-bun! Join me!"

Dustin held up his middle finger to his friends.

"Oh my God! That's amazing!" She laughed. "I can't believe Suzie, with a Z, is real! And she calls him Dusty-bun!" Max was lost in a fit of giggles. It was good to hear her laugh after the night they had had. It was like she had forgotten all the bad, if only for a moment.

"Yes!" Lucas said, joining in laughing.

"And he calls her Suzie-poo!" Will chimed in with a laugh.

"Laugh all you want, assholes," said Dustin. "But Suzie helped save our asses."

"You mean Suzie-poo?" Lucas teased causing Max and Will to laugh more.

Mike had a smile on his face as he looked down at Eleven next to him. She had a small smile, but he could tell her mind was other places. He put his arm around her, not caring that they were in front of their friends or that they were technically suppose to be broken up. She leaned into him.

"Okay," they heard Ms.Byers say as she came down the hall. "I've got Will's room all ready for you boys. Max and El can take my room, I'll take the couch."

"Are you sure, Ms.Byers?" Asked Max, finally containing her giggles. "We don't want to put you out."

El nodded in agreement.

"I'm sure. There's 2 of you and you'll be more comfortable in there. I'll be fine out here," she told them, grabbing a slice of pizza and heading to the kitchen.

The kids finished their pizza and got ready to head to bed.

"Come on, Will," said Dustin. "Let's go find your newest X-Men comic

before lights out."

Dustin and Will headed to Will's room calling goodnight behind them, leaving Mike and Lucas to say good night the girls.

Max stood, pulling Lucas up by the hand with her. They gathered up the plates to take to the kitchen to Ms.Byers. Max gave El a knowing look.

Eleven stayed seated on the couch, she wasn't ready to leave Mike just yet. He turned to face her.

"Hey El?" He asked.

She looked up at his face. "Yeah?"

"I just wanted to say... I'm sorry. About, about Hop," he said awkwardly. "Man, that sounds so lame. I just mean, that, you know, he, he loved you, and I know you miss him and you're sad and everything." He was rambling and he couldn't seem to stop himself. "What I mean to say is that... I'm here for you, you know, if you need anything. I'm always going to be here for you." Blush spread across his freckled cheeks.

She looked at him with a small, sad smile. She touched his cheek with one hand.

"I know you will be," she said before she brought her lips to meet his.

It was the first time she has kissed him in days and she realized how much she had missed him being her boyfriend. Even though she had dumped him, he had been there for her every moment she had needed him the last few days and she was thankful. She knew, no matter what happened, he would always do his best to be there when she needed him. She knew he would help heal the sadness she felt, that he would be a comfort for her in the weeks and months to come.

She pulled away from him, his forehead rested on hers.

"I'm sorry I dumped you," she whispered.

"I'm sorry I lied. Friends don't lie."

"Neither should boyfriends."

"Yeah," he said with a breathy laugh. "Neither should boyfriends."

She leaned back, looking him full in the face. "Will you be my boyfriend again?"

He smiled her favorite grin and nodded before kissing her again.

I'm a sucker for Eleven, so I needed them back together so Eleven can start healing from here on out. There will definitely be moments coming up when we see how Hopper's 'death' has affected her. Same with Max and Billy's death. I feel like Max is the kind of person to hide from sadness, and, let's be honest, even though Billy had a heroic death, he was still a jerk to her 90% of the time. Max just feels like someone who puts up a brave front more than Eleven might, but I'm excited to explore how they both deal!

xoxo- El

4. Chapter Four: Bad Dreams

"Billy!"

Max woke up in a panic, breathing fast. She sat up in bed, her hands going into her long, red hair.

"Shit," she breathed.

"Max?" She felt Eleven sit up next to her. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Yeah, sorry," Max whispered in the darkness. "Bad dream."

She settled back down in bed, sitting up against the pillows. El settled next to her, close to her friend.

"Billy?" Asked El.

"Yeah." Max took a deep breath in and slowly let it out, calming herself. "I don't even know why I'm upset. He was so mean to me most of the time."

She shook her head, as if trying to clear it like an etch-a-sketch.

"He was mean, and loud, and rude." Fresh tears feel down her face. "But he didn't deserve to die. He may have been a shit brother, but he was my shit brother." Max felt El wrap her arms around her, giving Max a sideways hug.

"I'm so sorry, Max." Max could hear tears in El's voice. "This is all my fault. Billy... Hop, they got hurt because I opened the gate." El explained. "Then closing it made him mad. This is all my fault," she said again quietly.

"No," Max said, shaking her head. "No, El." She wiped the tears from her eyes. "Lucas, he told me about how you grew up in the lab, how they made you do shit for them, and this was not your fault. This was all the Mind Flayer and the damn Russians. If those assholes had left the gate alone, none of this would have happened."

Max could tell El was thinking about something in her silence. Max

thought about how thankful she was for their friendship now. Since El had come back last November they hadn't formed much of a relationship. They spoke occasionally when the party was all together, but nothing like the past few days.

They laid in silence, El held Max's hand, a comforting gesture Max wasn't use to from the girl.

"Max?" Eleven asked.

"Yes?" Max could hear the sleepiness in her voice.

"You think it ever gets better? This feeling?"

Max thought about it. "When my parents got divorced, I was really sad. And when they told me we had to move it was even worse. I had to leave everything I knew, including my dad."

El gave her hand a small squeeze.

"Before I left he told me that sometimes sadness, it feels you're stuck under the water." She tried to explain it so she knew El would understand. "And you try to swim to the top, but you can't make it and it's dark and you stay there for awhile."

Max paused, she knew El was thinking about Hopper.

"But then, after some time, you can see light above the water. You have to swim to that light. Eventually, you'll reach it, and you'll finally be above water."

"That's good, right?"

"Yeah, except you're still stuck in the middle of the ocean."

"Oh."

"I think that, while the water is calm, you can swim. You can be happy, and laugh, and find reasons to swim. But then something will happen, something to remind you of your sadness, and it's like a wave is trying to push you back under."

"I don't want to stay under," Eleven said sadly.

"You won't," Max assured her. "Neither will I. We'll have each other to keep us up. And the boys, they'll keep us up, too. The chief, he'd want you to be happy, El."

El leaned her head against Max's shoulder, "I miss him so much already."

"I know," Max said quietly. She closed her eyes and leaned her head on her friends. "I know."

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In the living room, Joyce Byers looked at the clock. Three AM. She had tried to sleep but when she closed her eyes all she saw was Hopper's face.

The room was dimly lit with only a small lamp and the TV for light. She was holding a Manila folder in her hand. She'd been staring at it on the coffee table for at least an hour. Hopper had given it to her last December and told her to open it only if anything happened to him.

She took a deep breath, put out her cigarette, and opened the folder. The first thing she saw a copy of a birth certificate for Jane Hopper. She saw Jim Hopper listed as the father and Terry Ives as the mother.

Next was a sealed white envelope. She opened it and pulled out a letter.

'Joyce,

If you're reading this then I'm not around anymore. I don't know where this will find us, but I want you to know you're the only person I would trust with this matter.

When I adopted El, my biggest fear was not being able to protect her the way she would need, that somehow the lab would get ahold of her again and she'd never get the chance she deserved at a normal life. I know it's asking a lot of you, but I know you'd do your best to keep her safe now. You're an amazing mother to your boys and any kid would be lucky to

have you.

I've left everything I have to her and to you by proxy. It should be enough for you to take care of anything you'd need to.

You do have the option of saying no, Becky is always willing to take her in. No matter what you choose, I know you won't do it lightly.

Hopper.'

Tears dropped onto the paper in her hand as she finished reading. The papers that followed the letter were copys of his will, his life insurance policies, papers from the police station, a copy of the deed to his cabin, and finally guardianship papers for Eleven.

Oh Hop, she thought.

Joyce wiped the tears from her eyes, took a deep breath, and closed the folder.

Thoughts flooded her mind as she got up off the couch. She walked through the quiet house, down the hall to Will's bedroom.

She gently opened the door, not wanting to wake the boys. She stood in the doorway, taking in Will tucked in his bed, Mike on the floor on the right side, Dustin on the left, and Lucas at the foot of the bed. Joyce thought about how much they had all grown, starting to look more like men than boys. These boys had all been staples in her home for years, all a part of her family for their love of her son.

She closed the door and walked back down the hall. She didn't open Jonathan's door, just rested her hand on it as she passed. When she got to her room she paused before opening the door.

She smiled to herself seeing the girls curled up in bed. She walked over and gently sat on the edge of the bed next to Eleven. She was on her side, her left hand up near her face. Joyce could see her 011 tattoo in the dim light. She gently pushed El's brown hair from her eyes, taking in her sleeping face.

Joyce thought about one of the first times she'd really gotten to know Eleven. It was last year at Thanksgiving. She had invited Jim and El

to spend the day with them. All the other kids had shown up, wanting to spend time with Will and El. She had watched Eleven try to help Jonathan in the kitchen, he had to teach her how to peel potatoes, but she had been happy to learn. Joyce had watched how Jim had smiled at the girl, his whole face full of joy watching her laugh with her friends.

Joyce knew Eleven was special, and not just for her amazing abilities, but because of the resilience in her spirit. The girl had grown up in isolation and cruelty, yet had kindness in her soul. Joyce knew she couldn't fail Hopper in this. It would always be Eleven's choice where she wanted to be but Joyce wanted her to know the Byers house was an option.

I love Max and Eleven's friendship. I think it's a friendship they both need. Max is hard where El is soft.

I also felt like Hopper would not have been unprepared for his death. After losing Sarah and dealing with the Upside Down and the lab, I feel like he would have had things in place to keep her safe.

Feed back is always welcome and appreciated! Let me know your thoughts, if you agree or disagree!

xoxo- El.